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TSPL, EINV, MO  
SUBJECT: DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT MOROCCO

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B CASABLANCA 144 (NOTAL)

¶1. Summary. Far-flung and fluid, the Moroccan diaspora stretches throughout Europe, across the Atlantic Ocean, throughout the Middle East and North Africa (notably in Israel), and beyond. Some diasporans are recent immigrants to their adoptive country; others are second- or third-generation. Their occupations vary, and most preserve ties to their home country. Moroccans maintain virtual ties as well, taking advantage of web-based technologies to share experiences, seek relationships, and exchange ideas. The Moroccan government has established specific offices and organizations to engage the diaspora community. Moroccans living abroad engage in a variety of ways with their countrymen in Morocco, although they have not as yet been mobilized to undertake any large-scale relief or support efforts. End summary.

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Community and Collaboration  
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¶2. The Moroccan diaspora (locally referred to as MREs, for "Marocains residents a l'etranger") is an identifiable community, and the nature of its connection to the homeland is diverse. There are large Moroccan communities in several Western European countries - notably France, Spain, the Netherlands and Italy - as well as in Canada and the United States. Moroccans also live throughout the MENA region, most notably in Israel, where approximately one million citizens (about 15% of the population) claim Moroccan ancestry, representing a key link between Israel and the Arab World. Moroccans residing abroad do so for a variety of reasons. Most maintain ties to Morocco, and a large number return occasionally to spend time with kith and kin. The U.S. Consulate General in Casablanca issues approximately 3,000 diversity visas each year, in addition to approximately 45,000 visitor visas, indicating that there is considerable interest among Moroccans in maintaining or developing ties with the United States.

¶3. Moroccans residing abroad have a long tradition of remittances (ref B), with isolated instances of fund-raising abroad among expatriate Moroccans from the same village to support small-scale infrastructure projects back home. The Government of Morocco is concerned about the well-being of Moroccans residing abroad, and it has established structures and strategies, described below, to support them and to support the preservation of Moroccan cultural, linguistic, and religious identity.

¶4. The Moroccan Government is deeply concerned that some MREs living in Western Europe are promoting radical Islamist ideology in Morocco. Socio-economic conditions in parts of Morocco make certain segments of the population more susceptible to radicalizing efforts. Diaspora engagement that encourages the strengthening of economic ties with the goal of ameliorating difficult economic conditions and strengthening community linkages can contribute to national and international security and stability. In this regard, USG counter-radicalization efforts with diaspora communities in Western Europe (Embassy Paris, for example, has targeted underprivileged immigrant communities in France to recruit participants for its

International Visitor Leadership Program) could serve to weaken the pull of radical ideology. The GOM is active in this regard, sending imams trained in Morocco to minister to diaspora communities in Western Europe, seeking to counter the influence of Wahhabi clerics by promoting an alternative, moderate and authentically Moroccan trend of Islam.

¶5. The Embassy's Public Affairs Section administers the International Visitor Program and collaborates with the Moroccan American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange on the Fulbright and other academic exchange programs. PAS has also organized several television cooperatives with local networks focused on the lives and attitudes of the Moroccan diaspora community in the U.S. With these and other programs well-established and widely-popular in Morocco, the framework is in place to engage the Moroccan diaspora in the United States and foster further institutional affiliations with academic and professional communities across the Atlantic.

¶6. Post will continue to reach out to government agencies and non-governmental organizations in Morocco in order to broaden insight into their relationships with Moroccans abroad. Post welcomes feedback on Washington-based efforts to expand the knowledge base about the Moroccan diaspora in the United States. Among valuable knowledge management tools would be detailed socio-economic data on Moroccans resident in the US, to include information on their respective "home town" in Morocco, which would enable targeted outreach to the cities and villages that provide significant numbers of immigrants to the United States. Properly resourced, outreach to the Moroccan diaspora in the US can marshal the connections they maintain with family, friends, and colleagues in Morocco in an effort to advance US objectives overseas.

¶7. Post looks forward to working with S/GPI in advancing this important endeavor. Point of contact for future reference and follow-up is Brian Shott, Deputy Political Counselor.

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Institutional Structures  
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¶8. There are several organizations based in Morocco and abroad that engage the Moroccan diaspora. At the governmental level, primary among these is the office of the Minister Delegate to the Prime Minister for Affairs Concerning Moroccans Residing Abroad. The current Minister Delegate is Mohammad Ameer, and underpinning the work of the office are three main principles: defense of the interests of Moroccan nationals wherever they are; preservation of national linguistic, religious, and cultural identity; and active incorporation of Moroccan nationals living abroad into the human, economic, and social development of Morocco.

¶9. The Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Residing Abroad was established in 1990; its current president is Princess Lalla Meryem, daughter of the late King Hassan II. The Foundation is comprised of six operational units: Education, Cultural Exchanges, Sport, and Youth; Legal Assistance; Social Assistance; Economic Development; Cooperation and Partnership; and Communication. The Foundation works through a variety of programs; more information is available (in French) at <http://www.alwatan.ma>.

¶10. The Council for the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME) was created by royal decree in December 2007. It consists of 50 members serving four-year terms, and is charged with developing policy recommendations regarding emigration for the King. The CCME recently completed a survey of nearly 3000 Moroccans residing in various European countries; according to the results, three-quarters of Moroccans living abroad return annually to Morocco. As many as 60% of the respondents say they transfer money back to Morocco, either directly to individuals or their families, or in the form of support for a village project.

¶11. The High Atlas Foundation, founded by a former Peace Corps volunteer, maintains offices in both Morocco and the United States. It hosted an Iftar dinner in New York on September 16 to help raise money to advance the Foundation's "One Million Tree Campaign," which was launched in 2006 and has to-date planted over 140,000 fruit trees in Morocco.

¶12. Several U.S.-based organizations engage the Moroccan diaspora in the United States; among them are the Association of Moroccan Professionals in America, the Moroccan American Center for Policy, the Moroccan Foundation, the American-Moroccan Institute, Friends of Morocco, and the Moroccan American Coalition. Post received an invitation to the Coalition's fourth annual convention, to be held in Washington, DC in October. The theme of the convention is "Connect, Inspire, Grow," and the program envisions guest speakers from both sides of the Atlantic.

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Culture and Commensal Tradition  
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¶13. Nearly all Moroccans are Muslims, and with the Islamic holy month of Ramadan underway (August 22-o/a September 20) most of them fast from sunrise to sunset, breaking it with a ritualized meal called Iftar. For most Moroccans the traditional meal includes dates, a lentil stew called "harira," and an assortment of sweet and savory pastries. Standard fare in homes and some restaurants—including at "T.G.I Friday's" and McDonald's—the contents of the Iftar meal is considered uniquely Moroccan. As reported by the Moroccan news agency MAP, Moroccans living in the United States view Ramadan as an opportunity to stay attuned to their country of origin and to revive the traditions that marked Ramadan back home as they seek the "must have" Moroccan specialties.

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Virtual Community  
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¶14. The MoroccoBoard News Service (<http://www.moroccoboard.com>) houses information about the Moroccan diaspora in the United States and about Morocco-related events. The site includes a section urging Moroccan Americans to participate in the 2010 U.S. Census and providing brief background information about the census and its purpose, which suggests that site managers consider it important to help educate Moroccan-Americans and promote their inclusion in U.S. social and political processes.

¶15. Another rich website is MoroccoUSA.com (<http://www.moroccousa.com>). Based in Chicago, the site's expressed mission is to serve the Moroccan community in the US and abroad. It boasts over 14,000 subscribed members and features links to a range of resources, on-line discussion forums, advertisements, and other information.

Millard